DECLARATION

I declare that the subject matter embodied in this thesis which is being submitted by me for the award of PhD degree of K L University, Guntur (AP) India, is the result of investigations carried out by me under the Supervision of Dr. G. Mohanacharyulu, Associate Professor, K L University, Guntur, AP, India. The synopsis work is original and has not been submitted for any degree/ diploma of this or any other University.

Place: Guntur                                   Signature of the Scholar
Date: 10th May 2017                               S. Lavanya
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I again acknowledge my gratitude that my work could not have been completed without the good wishes, support and encouragement of my ever-concerned and husband ever-loving children. I thank all my family members for all their prayers and best wishes.
DEDICATED

TO

Smt. Kalyani & Smt. Indira Devi

who helped me reinvent myself.

to my Father. For his dream and blessings.

And to
ABSTRACT

Introduction

Self identity or autonomy popularly known as identity is an integral part of the very existence of mankind. Establishing identity is important for every Indian because of the myriad experiences through the ages from visitors, invaders, conquerors, merchants, pilgrims and lastly the greatest of all influences the imperial masters. Starting from ancient Greece and Persian influences India tided through many a changes into its culture.

Purpose of Research

The need for identity and space of their own is equally important to women, who comprise 50% of humanity. For reasons unknown, women have been marginalised. Indian literary scene has been dominated by men until recently, because of which women’s perspective was missing. It is of greatest importance to recognise and establish the position of women who are integral to society.

Need for Study

The present project is an attempt to explore the various factors that influence the lives of Indian women with reference to milieu, culture, tradition and beliefs. The focus of the study is exploring the relevance and implication of the factors that help in earmarking identity, keep changing from time to time, place to place.

Scope and Limitations

This project also examines the evolution of the protagonist in the select novels of Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai. Though other female characters exist they are not discussed at length. This study is not a mere feminist interpretation, it is more of the exploration of the circumstances and conditions that confine, disintegrate, expand
and or emancipate the human nature or mind of the protagonists. The objective of the project is to study at length the long journey of quest for identity in Indian literature and establish women’s identity by comparing women literature and the main stream literature, and thereby understand the struggle for identity in the select novels and the emergence of the same despite the pressures of sociological oppressions and psychological influences imposed by the Indian society, especially in the context of the select novels of these two writers.

**Hypothesis**

The project is based on the hypothesis that the quest and the reality of identity can be re-explored, reinvented with changing times and circumstances. This never ending journey of quest for identity is perennial. This project has been divided into six chapters.

**Research Design:**

The chapter scheme of the thesis is as under:

**Chapter-1: The Genesis**

**Chapter- 2: Sociological Oppression**

**Chapter-3: Psychological Oppression**

**Chapter- 4: The Quest and the Reality**

**Chapter-5: The Legacy**

**Chapter-6: Conclusion**

**Chapter – 1: Genesis – The Beginning**

This chapter presents the brief history of Indian Writing in English.

The birth of Indian writing in English was the manifestation of the period of metamorphosis from medieval to modern, from blind faith to rational thinking, from credulous acceptance to scientific questioning. It was also a period of political
awareness, social reform and religious reappraisal. It has been a long journey of exploration and struggle to establish the platform which is theirs. Attempts were made by many writers to define and establish the Indian position in the wider world of English literature but not many of them made a lasting impact.

It is a well known fact that women are natural story tellers. Women writers are not far behind their western counterparts, in carving a niche for their story telling abilities. They are renowned for their originality, versatility, and the flavor of indigenous Indian milieu which is evident in their work. The focus of most of the women writers in India has been on the predicament of woman in the emerging socio–economic scenario of the male dominated society. Each and every one of the woman writers explores and or struggles for identity. This is the underlying theme in the tales of all Indian woman writers.

Chapter-2: Sociological Oppression - The Pressure of Home and the World

This chapter explores sociological oppression and their impact on the condition of women, as reflected in fiction. Liberal feminists have championed equal legal and political rights for women to enable them to compete with a man in the public realm on equal terms.

The role assigned to women by the society, especially the middle class women in India is nothing but a mythical role of the ever caring, ever-sacrificing, ever-dormant, ever present and ever silent person. In this milieu more and many more women writers in Indian English are presenting their insight into the dilemma that modern women face in the Indian context.

This chapter focuses on the social circumstances of the protagonists Saru, Indu and Jaya and their confrontation of the oppressive sociological status thrust on them by the middle class Indian society in the name of tradition and culture. What is
common to these three heroines is their upper middle class background. All of them rebel against these impositions laid down by their family and society at large. While Saru’s defiance turns her into a materialist, Indu turns into the scared rabbit that runs away from her over possessive and over dependent Jaya on the other hand retreats into the abyss of silence locking away her emotions and all human and natural reactions. The social, physical and financial circumstances of these three women are explored at length in this chapter. Each one of them struggles for space and liberty within the narrow confines of the glorified virtues of the Indian womanhood, like patience, devotion and abject acceptance of everything and anything meted out to her. This stereotypical status puts women on a tall but dubious pedestal, thus restricting her movements to the small circle on the pedestal head. This is seen as a glorified imprisonment of the soul and mind of woman by all the three of them.

Anita Desai’s works represent a unique blend of the Indian and the western trends. Her novels catch the bewilderment of the individual psyche confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever-beckoning modern promise of self–gratification and self-fulfillment.

**Chapter-3: Psychological Influence – The fear within**

This Psychological oppression is what stunts the natural growth and development of emotions in the women of Shashi Deshpande’s novels. Whether it is Saru, or Indu or Jaya, all three had a good beginning with the support of their respective fathers, even if it was only for a short period. This itself should have given them the strength and confidence to work through or around any kind of setbacks that life hurls at them. But unfortunately in the absence of the father and his support all these three women are caught-up in the quagmire of the sociological conditions and
oppressions. One sees these women questioning the humiliating cultural, natural and sexual roles assigned to her from the unconscious dawn of patriarchal India.

They are seen to fight with the forces outside that they assume are the ones that cause their present state of helplessness and silence. In reality it is in their mind and emotions that are to be set in order. The present status is the result of the sociological reality with all its conditions and oppressions that tarnishes and controls the emotions, thoughts of deeds, of these women, without any outside supervision. In spite of all the rebellion against being smothered into the mould of traditional women she herself has internalized the entire do’s and don’ts so much so that she is unable to break free of those shackles which have been created by her own mind. Deshpande aims at portraying realistically Indian Women’s sense of frustration and their alienation. The characters are shown often as torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. Her women are struggling to find their own voice and continuously in search to define them. Whereas in Anita Desai, it is not the theme, but the inner and outer rhythms of human psyche which are all important. Anita Desai is a modernist who shares some common features with other prominent writers of the times.

These novels are psychological dramas, surfacing an inner conflict, through aesthetic objectivity. The poet novelist mirrors himself in the theme, and at the same time remains detached, till he is able to produce a spiritual self-image. This intrinsic relationship between all animate and inanimate objects, becomes the sole subject of the lyrical novelist.

Chapter-4: The Quest and the Reality

This chapter explores the definition of Identity. Identity is a process that is ever changing and never ending. It is a journey that is influenced by culture and
Therefore identity can never be created. Identity is the discovery that happens as one encounters, struggles and overcomes prevalent circumstances or problems.

This chapter further explores at length the perennial quest for identity that is evident in world literature. Self identity is seen differently by various philosophers. This unending struggle depends on the circumstances, the changing times and beliefs.

So in this context the status of women in India from the ancient times is studied.

Self is a psychological process. It is a dynamic concept which implies a sense of identity. It is the sum total of the physical and mental attributes of the person including his will and actions in both the individual and the social dimensions. The concept of self raises such questions before an individual as Who am I? How can I find out? What I am? To answer these questions it is necessary for each individual to have knowledge of his or her “self”. Societal changes are responsible for the dissatisfaction with the self as object among many people in the contemporary world.

People cannot identify themselves fully with others, individuals as well as institutions, since the social structures themselves are unstable and dynamic. In such cases the evolution of self as a process can generate a unique aspect of self which reflects through the process of self-development. As Gardner Murphy says, self is a center, an anchorage point, a standard of comparison, an ultimate reality. Inevitably, it takes its place as a supreme value.

Quest as a leit motif is seen in the novels of both Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai. Shashi Deshpande is regarded as a forceful writer who presents the struggle of women in modern India. Her protagonists represent the middle class, well educated women who belong to the upper strata of society in an urban milieu. There is revolt by the protagonist against society, family and men who attempt to marginalize them.
These career women from middle-class families face the predicament of fulfilling their duties and choosing between their personal and professional lives. Saru, Jaya or Indu face many trials and tribulations but are seen coming to terms with themselves by redefining their relationship and emerge as fully developed individuals, who are able to do justice to their professional as well as personal lives.

Chapter -5: The Legacy

This chapter explores the contribution of Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai to the Indian Writing in English and to world literature. Attempt is made to study the various aspects of novel like narrative technique, characterization, feminist approach, milieu, themes etc. The chapter identifies the legacy left by these writers to the genre of Indian English fiction.

Literary contribution of Shashi Deshpande

Shashi Deshpande depicts the anguish and conflict of modern educated Indian women caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and self-expression, individuality and independence on the other. Her fiction explores the search of the woman to fulfil herself as a human being, independent of her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother. She examines a variety of common domestic crises that trigger off the search. Her main concern and sympathy are primarily for the woman. While revealing the woman’s struggle to secure self-respect and self-identity, the author subtly unravels the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression experienced by women in our society at home and outside.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novels, one can find a wide variety of characters too. In Deshpande’s literary world there are characters taken from almost all sections of society. They are medical practitioners, writers, educated housewives, uneducated ones and maidservants. Besides poverty, bereavement and such other common
adversities, there are some causes of suffering that are exclusive to women. Deshpande renders with sympathetic understanding the variety of suffering a woman has to undergo. Sometimes the suffering is attached to the social taboos, and sometimes the woman is silenced in the name of family honour, and is compelled to endure torture.

**Literary contribution of Anita Desai**

Desai is praised for her broad understanding on intellectual issues, and for her ability to portray her country so vividly with the way the eastern and western cultures have blended there. She portrays the cultural and social changes that India has undergone as she focuses on the incredible power of family and society and the relationships between family members, paying close attention to the trials of women suppressed in Indian society. Throughout her novels, children's books, and short stories, Desai focuses on personal struggles and problems of contemporary life that her Indian characters must cope with.

Delving into the psychic depths of her female characters, Anita Desai portrays them as individuals facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence. Carefully avoiding being associated with any Feminist movement, she makes it clear that her concern as an artist is with the individual men and women. True to her convictions as an artist, Anita Desai, in her novels, seizes upon that incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around her and tries to discover the significance by probing below the surface and plumbing the depths and then illuminating those depths till they become more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world. The aspects of theme and technique in Anita Desai’s novels are not isolated elements. They are inter-laced at many levels of structure and
texture. The theme serves as the skeleton incorporating the whole life-perspective of
the novelist through situations and scenes that are unique to her alone.

Images in Anita Desai are not confined to the world of art only. There are
scientific images too. Both these images produce aesthetic effects and impart a
tangible shape to stir up emotional states of the alienated self. There is in her a
persistent search for the most appropriate symbols and images in the expression of the
subterranean and subconscious. Anita Desai’s mastery over words is manifested in her
felicitous use of images. Her imagery is always in character which suits the
lonesomeness of her characters. In Anita Desai’s novels, the struggle of the alienated
self takes place through dialectic of images, through an intricate pattern of imagery.
The core images of alienation are found enmeshed with the other images arising out
of it. Each image holds within it the seeds of the self’s own destruction and Anita
Desai’s dialectical method is a constant building up and splitting down of the images
that come out of the character’s state of desolation. The images do not conflict or
contradict with each other but are in perfect harmony and in concord with the nature
of the character’s alienation. Anita Desai does not make use of the scientific and the
Biblical imagery in her novels. Through imagery, she achieves the polarization of the
opposites. In her novels there are a number of symbols which have a contextual
significance. In her novels characters are found to be ‘thinking in images’, i.e. images
which strike the mind as the projection of other minds in immediate context with
social realities.

**Chapter- 6: Conclusion**

This chapter examines how the women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and
Anita Desai, emerge from their individual struggle with self and with that of the
society.
Generally, a woman’s identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife and a mother. This means virtually a woman doesn’t have an identity of her own. This is very true in the Indian context. Deshpande, brings out clearly that, marriage is not the end or a purpose of a woman’s life, when marriage failed to provide her protagonists the love or the freedom they aspired for; they become restless, hurt and seek a short disassociation from their immediate family-husband and children, only to come back with self realization. Same is the situation portrayed by Desai. Both the novelists carefully analyse the situations and circumstances in which a sensitive woman lives squeezed between the powerful currents of tradition and patriarchy, of terror and suppression. Her identity, personality is totally crushed, her voice is hushed up and her very instinct of self-assertion gets strangled. Thus leading her to total confusion, torment along with loss of self identity.

Hence it becomes essential for women to assert their role models and redefine its parameters. Their concerns and preoccupations paved way to establish the relational development and continuity in the construction of the subjectivity of women.

This final chapter establishes that search or quest for identity or self is unending. This is because the definition, the fabric, the essence of self identity keeps changing from time to time, place to place, country to country, culture to culture, religion to religion, region to region and gender to gender. Thus quest for self is unending because the values, definitions, social ethos, associated with what self should be keep changing from time to time. This quest is one area of study that is never-ending and ever evolving.
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